

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 08023 01 OF 02 191157Z

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SECSTATE WASHDC 9435

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV SECTION 1 OF 2 8023

EXDIS

FOR ATHERTON ONLY FROM TOON

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, XF, IS, US

SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE ISRAELI SCENE

1. PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO BRING YOU UP-TO-DATE ON
RECENT EVENTS IN ISRAEL AS WELL AS THE REACTIONS HERE TO
DEVELOPMENTS ABROAD SINCE YOU LEFT WASHINGTON.

2. LEADERSHIP DISARRAY. MOST STRIKING FEATURE
OF RECENT DAYS HAS BEEN THE
DISARRAY IN THE PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS OF THE SENIOR LEADER-
SHIP AND THEIR ADVISERS OVER A VARIETY OF ISSUES. RABIN AND
ALLON ARE ON DIFFERENT WAVE LENGTHS ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION,
PARTICULARLY REGARDING THE QUESTION OF A CABINET DEBATE FOR
A POLICY REASSESSMENT BEFORE THEIR WASHINGTON VISITS. (RABIN
CONTINUES TO INSIST THAT WHILE IN WASHINGTON ALLON IS
AUTHORIZED TO DISCUSS NOTHING BUT JANUARY 12 SC STRATEGY.)
PERES AND ALLON CLASHED OPENLY AT A RECENT LABOR PARTY
MEETING OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S COMPROMISE WITH THE SEBASTIA
SETTLERS. PERES CAME OUT LAST WEEK FOR A UNITY GOVERNMENT AND
SHARON FOR AN EMERGENCY CABINET, JUST AFTER RABIN HAD ONCE
AGAIN AFFIRMED THAT HE SAW NO BASIS FOR CHANGING THE COMPOSITION
OF THE COALITION.

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PAGE 02 TEL AV 08023 01 OF 02 191157Z

3. SIMILARLY, ISRAELI LEADERS SEEM TO HAVE RADICALLY DIFFERENT

ASSESSMENTS OF THE SITUATION LIKELY TO CONFRONT ISRAEL NEXT YEAR. RABIN IN HIS DE BORCHGRAVE INTERVIEW, FOR INSTANCE, STRONGLY SUGGESTED THE POSSIBILITY OF WAR AND SHARON HAS CHARACTERIZED ISRAEL'S SITUATION AS ALMOST CATASTROPHIC, WHILE PERES THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON ESTIMATED THAT THERE WILL BE NEITHER WAR NOR MUCH DIPLOMATIC MOMENTUM. THIS KIND OF DISARRAY IS NEITHER NEW OR SURPRISING, BUT IT DOES UNDERSCORE THE POLITICAL AND PERSONAL DIVISIONS RIGHT UP TO THE TOP WHICH CHARACTERIZE ISRAEL TODAY AND WHICH LEAVE THE PUBLIC RATHER MORE DISORIENTED THAN USUAL ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT-- EXCEPT THAT THE SITUATION IS LIKELY TO GET WORSE.

4. LABOR PARTY RALLIES BEHIND RABIN. IN THE LAST WEEK THE LABOR PARTY HAS AGAIN RALLIED AROUND RABIN, AFTER THE DOVES HAD LASHED HIM SEVERELY IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK FOR WHAT THEY REGARD AS TOO RIGID POLICIES TAKEN WITHOUT SUFFICIENT CONSULTATION WITH THE PARTY. SEVERAL OF THE MAJOR PARTY BRANCHES (TEL AVIV AND HAIFA) HAVE NOW PASSED RESOLUTIONS REAFFIRMING THEIR CONFIDENCE IN RABIN'S LEADERSHIP, BUT THIS MAY BE LITTLE MORE THAN RECOGNITION THAT THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE TO HIS LEADERSHIP RATHER THAN SOLID VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN RABIN. AT THE SAME TIME, ALLON HAS BEEN SHARPLY CRITICIZED BY THE MEDIA AFTER THE LATEST MEXICAN VOTE CONDEMNING ZIONISM. THE OFFICIAL MFA EXPLANATION THAT ALLON KNEW ALL ALONG WHAT THE MEXICAN POSITION WOULD BE BUT HAD NOT HAD TIME TO BRIEF HERZOG OR THE KNESSET SOUNDED RATHER LAME EVEN IF IT WERE TRUE. HAARETZ'S YOEL MARCUS, WHO KNOWS THE THE LEADERS AND THE HISTORY OF ISRAELI POLITICS FROM CLOSE OBSERVATION, HAS JUST WRITTEN A STINGING CRITIQUE OF ALLON, PREDICTING THAT AS IN THE PAST HE IS LIKELY TO CAVE IN TO THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE RATHER THAN RISK A SHOWDOWN WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN HIS SURRENDER OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY.

5. RABIN CONTROLS FOREIGN POLICY. AT THE MOMENT, THESE DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS SEEM TO ADD UP TO FACT THAT THE PACE AND SUBSTANCE OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY IS MORE FIRMLY THAN EVER IN RABIN'S HANDS. HE SEEMS CONVINCED THAT HIS CURRENT STAND-PAT POSITION IS THE RIGHT WAY TO KEEP HIS DIVIDED COALITION TOGETHER AND ALSO THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO THE DEMANDS FROM ABROAD FOR NEW IDEAS. IN OTHER WORDS IT IS NOT ONLY WEAKNESS ON THE DOMESTIC SCENE BUT

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 08023 01 OF 02 191157Z

AT LEAST EQUALLY RABIN'S OWN PREDILECTIONS WHICH ACCOUNT FOR CURRENT INERTIA ON THE ISRAELI SIDE. FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE THIS SEEMS TO MEAN THAT: A) ALLON'S WASHINGTON MANDATE WILL BE SEVERELY RESTRICTED; B) ISRAEL WILL HOLD FIRM AGAINST PARTICIPATION IN THE JANUARY 12 UNSC DEBATE; AND C) THERE WILL BE NO EARLY REASSESSMENT OF ITS PALESTINIAN POLICY.

6. US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. A) THE MEDIA HAS GIVEN CONSIDERABLE

COVERAGE TO YOUR MIDDLE EAST TRIP WHICH IS BEING PLAYED HERE AS AN EFFORT TO MODERATE THE ARAB POSITION IN THE JANUARY 12 DEBATE AND TO PAVE THE WAY FOR COORDINATION OF US/ISRAELI POSITIONS LOOKING BEYOND THAT DEBATE TO THE RABIN VISIT. MEDIA CLAIM--AND THIS HAS BEEN REINFORCED BY ISRAELI COMMENTS TO US--THAT LEADERSHIP EXPECTS FULL BRIEFING BY YOU ON ARAB ATTITUDES REVEALED DURING YOUR STOPS. B) PERES' VISIT TO WASHINNGTON HAS BEEN PRESENTED HERE AS LARGELY SUCCESSFUL. THE PRESS HAS SAID THAT RUMSFELD PROMISED PERES TO DO HIS BEST TO SPEED UP DELIVERY OF EQUIPMENT ALREADY CONTRACTED, ALTHOUGH NO SPECIFIC DELIVERY DATES WERE SET. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE, PERES IS REPORTED TO HAVE CONCLUDED FROM HIS WASHINGTON TALKS THAT 1976 WILL BE A YEAR OF SLOW DIPLOMATIC MOVEMENT PROBABLY WITHOUT ANOTHER WAR. ACCORDINGLY, PERES APPEARS TO BE COUNSELLING AGAINST HASTY NEGOTIATIONS AND SUGGESTING INSTEAD THAT ISRAEL WAIT OUT THE RESULTS OF OUR ELECTION. C) ALSOP'S "DEAR AMOS" LETTER, ADDRESSED TO RABIN'S DG AMOS ERAN AND PUBLISHED OVER THE WEEKEND IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, HAS BEEN PLAYED HERE AS ANOTHER SIGN OF THE ADMINISTRATIONS'S IMPATIENCE AND DIS-SATISFACTION WITH ISRAELI RELUCTANCE TO PROCEED INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH SYRIA. THE PRESS HAS BEEN PREDICTING A "DEAR JOE" LETTER FROM ERAN IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS REBUTTING ALSOP'S CHARGES OF ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN U.S. POLITICS. D) ON HEELS OF SAUNDER'S TESTIMONY, BROOKINGS REPORT ON A PROPOSED MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT HAS FURTHER RAISED HACKLES HERE, WITH ISRAELI OBSERVERS INTERPRETING IT AS ONE MORE INDICATION OF

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 08023 02 OF 02 191200Z

14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8023

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PRESSURE FROM ABROAD ON ISRAEL TO MAKE SOME TOUGH CONCESSIONS IN THE INTEREST OF PEACE. THE PARTS DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE AND JERUSALEM HAVE RAISED THE GREATEST CRIES OF PROTEST. E) HAARETZ DECEMBER 18 REPORTS THAT FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF ELAZAR WILL REPLACE DINITZ AS ISRAELI AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON SOME TIME EARLY NEXT SPRING, BUT THIS HAS BEEN PRIVATELY DENIED BY RABIN'S STAFF AND GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN ISSUED OFFICIAL DENIAL LAST NIGHT.

7. LEBANON. PRIMARY ISRAELI CONCERN OVER LEBANESE INTERNAL CONFLICT REMAINS ESSENTIALLY AS WE HAVE REPORTED IN PAST: THE DANGER OF A CHANGE IN THE MILITARY SITUATION IN THE NORTH BY THE INTRODUCTION OF SYRIAN OR OTHER ARAB FORCES IN SIGNIFICANT STRENGTH TO POSE A THREAT TO THE NORTHERN FLANK OF IDF FORCES CURRENTLY DEPLOYED AGAINST SYRIA.

8. ISRAEL ALSO REMAINS INTERESTED OF COURSE IN THE GENERAL EVOLUTION OF EVENTS WITHIN LEBANON, AND WOULD BE GREATLY CONCERNED AT THE PROSPECT OF A TILT IN THE INTERNAL BALANCE TOWARD CONTROL BY MUSLIM EXTREMISTS INTERESTED IN TURNING LEBANON INTO ANOTHER CONFRONTATION STATE. OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH ISRAELI OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, REVEAL A REALISTIC APPRECIATION OF THE CONTINUING STRENGTH OF CHRISTIAN FORCES. IN ANY CASE, OVERT ISRAELI MILITARY ACTION IN LEBANON IS CONSTRAINED
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 08023 02 OF 02 191200Z

TO A LARGE EXTENT BY THE PROSPECT OF A STRONGLY NEGATIVE REACTION BY THE U.S. TO WHICH ISRAELI OFFICIALS FROM RABIN DOWN HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY ALERTED.
TOON

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